



James Boyd



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**JAMES BOYD was born in Phantom Valley, Indian Territory, in an Indian hut. A man named Sanford Wooldrige stole him and brought him to Texas, somewhere near Waco. James does not know his age, but thinks he is a hundred years or more old. He now lives in Itasca, Texas.**

"I's born in dat Phantom Valley, in de Indian Territory, what am now call Oklahoma. Us live in a Indian hut. My pappy Blue Bull Bird and mammy Nancy Will. She come to de Indian Territory with Santa Anna, from Mississippi, and pappy raise in de Territory. I don' 'member much 'bout my folks, 'cause I stole from dem when I a real li'l feller. I's a-fishin' in de Cherokee River and a man name Sanford Wooldrige come by. You see, de white folks and de Indians have de fight 'bout dat day. I's on de river and I heard yellin' and shootin' and folkses runnin' and I slips into some bresh right near. Den come de white man

and he say, 'Everybody kilt, nigger, and dem Indians gwine kill you iffen day cotch you. Come with me and I ain't 'low dem hurt you.' So I goes with him.

"He brung me to Texas, but I don't know jus' where, 'cause I didn't know nothin' 'bout dat place. Massa Sanford good to us, but look out for he missus, she sho' tough on niggers. Dere 'bout 1,600 acres in de plantation and de big house am nice. When de niggers wouldn't work dey whup 'em. Us work all week and sometime Sunday, iffen de crops in a rush. Massa not much on presents or money but us have warm clothes and plenty to eat and de dry place to live, and dat more'n lots of niggers has now. [Pg 118]

"Sometime us have de corn huskin' and dere a dollar for de one what shuck de mos' corn. Us have de big dance 'bout twict a year, on Christmas and sometime in de summer. When de white folks have dere big balls us niggers cook and watch dem dance. Us have fun den.

"I likes to think of dem times when us fish all de hot day or hunts or jus' lazed 'round when de crops am laid by. I likes to shet de eyes and be back in old times and hear 'em sing, "Swing, low, Sweet Chariot." I can't sing, now you knows can't no old man sing what ain't got no teef or hair. I used to like to swing dat 'Ginia Reel and I's s pry and young den.

"Dere's lots I can't 'member, 'cause my mem'ry done gone weak like de res' of me, but I 'member when us free us throw de hats in de air and holler. Old massa say, 'How you gwine eat and git clothes and sech?' Den us sho' scairt and stays with us white folks long as us can. But 'bout a year after dat I gits de job punchin' cattle on a ranch in South Texas. I druv cattle into Kansas, over what de white folks calls de Chissum Trail. I worked lots of cattle and is what dey call a top hand. I's workin' for Massa Boyd den, and he gits me to drive some cattle to Mexico. He say he ain't well no more and for me to sell de cattle and send him de money and git de job down dere. I goes on down to Mexico and do what he say. I marries a gal name Martina in 1869, down in Matamoras. Us have four chillen and she die. Dat break me up and I drifts back to Huntsville.

"I done change my name from Scott Bird, what it am up in de Territory, and make it James Boyd, 'cause I done work for Massa Boyd. I's gwine be 'bout 108 year old in next January, iffen de Lawd spare me dat long. [Pg 119]

"After I been in Huntsville awhile, I marries Emma Smith but us only stay together 'bout a year and a half. Wasn't no chillen. Den I drifts to Fort Bend County and dere I marries Mary McDowd and us have two chillen. She die with de yellow fever and off I goes for Burleson County. Dere I marries Sally McDave and she quits me after us have three chillen. Down in old Washington County I marries Frances Williams and us lived together till 1900. Dere am no chillen dere. Den I goes to Austin after she die and marries Eliza Bunton in 1903. Us have eight chillen and she die in 1911. Den I comes to Hill County and marries Mittie Cahee in 1916. She quit me. In 1924 I marries Hegar Price clost to Milford. Us live together now, in Itasca. Us didn't have no chillen, but dat don't matter, 'cause I's de daddy of 'bout twenty already.

"I mos' allus wore de black suit when I marries. Jes' seemed more dressed up like. Some my wives wear white and some colors, didn't make much diff'rence, so dey a likely lookin' gal for me. Sometime it am a preacher and sometime it am Jestice of Peace, but de fust time it am Catholic and priest and all.

"Talkin' 'bout all dis marryin', I mos' forgit to show you my scar. I fit in dat freedom war 'long side Massa Sanford and got shot. Dat bullet go through de breast and out de back and keep me six months in de bed. De fust battle I's in am at Halifax, in North Car'lina. Us git de news of freedom when us at Vicksburg,

in Mississippi. Mos' us niggers 'fraidsay much. De new niggers 'spect de gov'ment give dem de span of mules and dey be rich and not work. But dey done larn[Pg 120] a lot dese past years. Us am sho' slaves now to hard work, and lucky iffen us git work. Lots dem niggers figgers dey'd git dere massa's land, but dey didn't. Dey oughta of knowed dey wouldn't. Warn't no plantation ever divided I knowed of, but some de massas give de oldest slaves a li'l piece land.

"After de cattle days done gone, I farms in Hill County. I works twelve year for Massa Claude Wakefield, right near Milford, too. De old man ain't due to live nowhere long and I's gittin' 'bout ready to cross de river. I's seed a heap of dis here earth and de people in it, but I tells you it am sho' hard time now. Us is old and cripple' and iffen de white folks don't help us I don't know what us gwine do.

"Some dese young niggers gone plumb wild with dere cigars and cars and truckin' and jazzin' and sech. Some go to school and larn like white folks and teach and be real helpful. But talk 'bout workin' in slave time—'twarn't so hard as now. Den you fuss 'cause dere's work, now you fuss 'cause dere ain't no work. But den us have somethin' to eat and wear and a place to sleep, and now us don't know one day what gwine fill us tomorrow, or nothin'.

"I'd sho' like to shake Massa Boyd's hand again and hear him come singin' down de lane. Us hear him sing or whistle long 'fore he git dere and it mighty good to see him. De slaves allus say, 'I's gwine 'way tomorrow,' and I guess I's gwine 'way pretty soon tomorrow. [Pg 121]

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